

Message Text

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ORIGIN ERDA-07

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO USMISSION IAEA VIENNA
INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TECH, IAEA

SUBJECT: REMOVAL FROM VIETNAM OF NUCLEAR REACTOR FUEL

REF: IAEA VIENNA 2801

1. AS THERE MAY BE SOME DELAY IN ISSUANCE FORM 741, FOLLOWING
FOR IAEA IS INFORMATION, BASED ON OUR RECORDS, REGARDING ITEMS
REMOVED FROM VIETNAM:

A. 67 FUEL ELEMENTS (UNDER LEASE TO VIETNAM) WHICH, ON
BASIS AVAILABLE RECORDS, CONTAIN 12,146 GRAMS TOTAL URANIUM,
2,380 GRAMS FISSIONABLE MATERIAL. THESE ELEMENTS WERE REMOVED
FROM REACTOR TO 55-GALLON CONCRETE-FILLED DRUMS.

B. 2 APPARENTLY UNUSED ELEMENTS IN ORIGINAL SHIPPING
BOXES (PROVIDED UNDER SALE TO IAEA, NO. IAEA/S/26), CONTAINING
382 GRAMS TOTAL URANIUM, 76 GRAMS FISSIONABLE MATERIAL.

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C. PLUTONIUM-BERYLLIUM SOURCE CONTAINING 80 GRMAS PLUTONIUM,

WHICH WAS PROVIDED UNDER SALE TO VIETNAM. THIS WAS PLACED IN CONCRETE-FILLED DRUM SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED FOR NEUTRON SOURCE.

2. ITEMS WERE REMOVED FROM REACTOR UNDER SUPERVISION OF EXPERTS FROM IDAHO OPERATIONS OFFICE WITH EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN HANDLING IRRADIATED TRIGA FUEL ELEMENTS. REPORTS OF ACTIVITY LEVELS FROM DRUMS ARE INCOMPLETE. U.S. WAS INFORMED THAT REACTOR HAD NOT OPERATED SINCE ABOUT 1969.

3. MATERIAL IS AT PRESENT ON JOHNSTON ATOLL (700 MILES SW OF HAWAII), STORED IN BUNKER UNDER CONTROL OF U.S. DEFENSE NUCLEAR AGENCY. TENTATIVE PLAN IS TO TRANSFER TO CONTINENTAL U.S. (SITE UNDECIDED) WITHIN SIX MONTHS. WILL ADVISE WHEN TRANSFER MADE OR WHEN MORE INFORMATION AVAILABLE.

4. U.S. HAS ASSUMED CUSTODY OF LISTED ITEMS. HOWEVER, WE RECOGNIZE AGENCY CONCERN WITH RESPECT TO ITS SAFEGUARDS RESPONSIBILITIES, IN LIGHT OF CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MADE VERIFICATION OF QUANTITIES AND COMPOSITION OF MATERIAL BEFORE REMOVAL FROM VIETNAM IMPOSSIBLE. IF AGENCY REQUESTS OPPORTUNITY TO VERIFY QUANTITIES AND COMPOSITION, EVERY EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO ACCOMMODATE. HOWEVER, MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR INSPECTION VISIT WHILE MATERIAL IS ON JOHNSTON ATOLL MIGHT BE DIFFICULT, SINCE IT IS IN U.S. MILITARY AREA. IN ANY CASE, THERE IS NO FACILITY ON JOHNSTON SUITABLE FOR SAFE OPENING OF CASKS. RECOMMEND, THEREFORE, THAT ANY REQUESTED VERIFICATION BE POSTPONED UNTIL MATERIAL IS IN U.S. AGENCY WOULD THEN HAVE HAD ADEQUATE TIME TO PLAN INSPECTION PROCEDURE AND PREPARE INSTRUMENTATION NECESSARY TO PERMIT MEANINGFUL VERIFICATION.

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